

## The God who Relents from Doing Harm

*Jonah, Part VI*

Jonah 3:10-4:2

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### An Outline of Jonah

1:1-3	<i>Jonah Disobeys God</i>
1:4-17	<i>God Pursues Jonah</i>
2:1-10	<i>Jonah Turns to God</i>
3:1-4	<i>Jonah Obeyes God</i>
3:5-10	<i>God Delivers Nineveh</i>
4:1-11	<i>Jonah Complains Against God</i>

### I. Nineveh shall be overthrown! Or not?

### II. Yahweh, the God who Relents from Doing Harm

#### A. God's Response to the Ninevites' Repentance (3:10)

God did not simply hear the Ninevites' voices but *saw their works*. He *saw* that they truly repented and *turned from their evil way*. They manifested \_\_\_\_\_ sorrow (2 Cor 7:10). So God *relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them*.

#### B. Jonah's Response to God's Response (4:1-2 cf. Ex 34:6-7; Lam 3:31-33)

Why? Because this is the kind of God Yahweh is. He is a God of mercy and compassion and *relents from doing harm*. As He declared to Moses:

<sup>6</sup>...*"Yahweh, Yahweh God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."* (Ex 34:6-7)

While Yahweh is a God of both *mercy* and *justice*, *mercy* predominates. He is ever willing to forgive the repentant. He regularly *relents from doing harm*:

- *"So Yahweh relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people"* (Ex 32:14).
- *"He regarded their affliction... And for their sake He remembered His covenant, And relented according to the multitude of His mercies"* (Ps 106:44f).
- *"Yahweh relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, 'It is enough; now restrain your hand'"* (2 Sam 24:16).

### III. Reading God's Prophets Rightly

So how do we reconcile this passage with other passages of Scripture which declare that God does not \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17)?

#### A. Distinguish God's Demands from God's Decrees (cf. Dt 29:29; Is 46:8-10)

We must distinguish between God's *decrees* and God's *demands*; or between God's \_\_\_\_\_ *will* and *revealed will*. *"The \_\_\_\_\_ things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Dt 29:29). Moses reminds Israel that there are many things we don't know – many things that are *secret*. But God knows them! They *belong to the Lord our God!* These secret things are called His decrees. WSC Q#7: *What are the decrees of God? A. The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass. As God declares:*

<sup>8</sup>*Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the*

*end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' (Isaiah 46:8–10)*

God *declares the end from the beginning*. He has *decreed* all things, and His *decrees* never change. But God has revealed very few of His *decrees* to us – hence, they are called His \_\_\_\_\_ *will*. So how are we supposed to conduct our lives? In accordance with God's *revealed will*, His commandments, His moral law, His *demands* not His *decrees*.

#### B. Understand the Task of God's Prophets (cf. Jer 18:7-10; Joel 2:12-14)

When God commissioned the prophets, their fundamental calling was to explain God's *demands*, His \_\_\_\_\_ *will*; only rarely would they reveal God's *decrees*, His *secret will*. In other words, the purpose of their ministry was to evoke a response from the people to whom they spoke. Hence, when they warned about a coming judgment, only rarely was that judgment unavoidable. God explains this quite clearly:

<sup>7</sup>*The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, <sup>8</sup>if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. <sup>9</sup>And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, <sup>10</sup>if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. (Jer 18:7-10)*

While God would occasionally give a prophet a final word that brooked no possibility of change (e.g., 1 Sam 15:28-29), more typically they revealed God's *demand* for repentance not His *decree* of the future. So they regularly urged their hearers:

*"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him— A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?" (Joel 2:12-14)*

#### C. Stop Misreading the Prophets (cf. Jer 15:6; Mt 21:33-46; 2 Tim 3:16f)

The prophets primarily addressed issues in their own day not \_\_\_\_\_. They rarely revealed God's *decrees*; they regularly applied the *demands* of God's law to their contemporaries. Hence, they expected their audiences to know what they were talking about and to respond in faith to God's word. Does that mean that what they revealed is irrelevant for us? Not at all! For the ways of God have not changed. History doesn't necessarily repeat itself, but it does rhyme. And the Scriptures give us the patterns that enable us to discern the rhymes. Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy:

<sup>16</sup>*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)*

The Scriptures equip us to understand how God rules among the nations. He remains the Lord of history. If we believe that we can scorn His Christ, scorn His moral law, and continue to enjoy the blessings of liberty, prosperity, light, and peace that we have enjoyed thus far, then we are fools. *"The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out"* (Pr 13:9).

## IV. Conclusion